

Washington, DC – **Congressman Michael Honda (CA-15)**, Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) released the following statement today in celebration of Asian Pacific American (APA) Heritage Month, which takes place May of each year:

"Asian Pacific American Heritage Month is a time for us to take pride in the diversity of our nation, celebrate the contributions of Asian American and Pacific Islanders to this nation, and reaffirm our commit to the promise of America's future for all Americans.

"This year marks the 30th anniversary of the first Asian Pacific American Heritage Week. Our country first celebrated this opportunity for reflection in 1978, thanks to the efforts of Representatives Norman Mineta and Frank Horton, and Senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga. Now an annual event, the month of May gives both Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and non-Asians around the nation a chance to celebrate the rich heritage of our community, reflect on the challenges overcome in our past, and look forward with hope and optimism toward our future.

"The first AAPI settlement in this country dates to 1763, when Filipinos escaped imprisonment aboard Spanish galleons and established a community near New Orleans. Chinese and Japanese immigrants likewise started communities in Hawai'i and California, where they sought labor and agricultural opportunities.

"From the time of these first settlements, AAPIs have experienced dual currents of discrimination and assimilation. In the difficult times, Asians were singled out for persecution by such acts as the Exclusion Laws of 1882 and 1924, and the Alien Land Act of 1913, which prohibited AAPI property ownership.

"From the legal fight against internment championed by Fred Korematsu, to the efforts in response to the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit, to the current fight for full benefits for the thousands of Filipinos who fought for our country during World War II, the national AAPI community has stood ready to rally for justice and equality.

"Rather than withdraw, grow embittered, or be cowed by discrimination, the AAPI community

has embraced and actively participated in American society. In addition to the tireless commitment of many AAPI families to raise their children as positive contributors to their various communities – by investing in education, businesses, and opportunities for the future – individual AAPIs have distinguished themselves for their service and vision.

"This list of notables includes Prince Jonah Kuhio Kalanianoʻle, who in 1903 became the first Native Hawaiʻian and Pacific Islander to serve in Congress; Dalip Singh Saund, who in 1956 became the first Asian American elected to Congress; Hiram Leong Fong, who in 1959 became the first AAPI member of the United States Senate; and Patsy Mink, who forty-three years ago became the first Asian American woman elected to the Congress. Congresswoman Mink's historical efforts for educational gender equity through Title IX continue to make us proud of our history.

"Today this legacy continues. Under the Clinton Administration, Secretary Norman Mineta became the first AAPI appointed to a cabinet-level position and is the first AAPI to be a cabinet member under two different administrations. Congressman Robert Matsui was a member of the Democratic leadership serving as the highest-ranking AAPI in congressional history. Congresswoman Matsui now carries on the great work of her late husband. Congresswoman Mazie Hirono of Hawaiʻi joined our CAPAC ranks last year. On the gubernatorial front, former governor of Washington State, Gary Locke, the first AAPI elected as governor on the mainland, commands national attention. Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal followed suit last year, when he was elected as the first person of Indian descent to serve as governor of a state, and the first minority governor of Louisiana since Reconstruction.

"Today, we celebrate not only the individuals that have forged milestones throughout our proud history, but we also celebrate our growing community. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are a critical part of our nation's growth and success. With more than 15 million Americans identifying themselves as Asian American or Pacific Islander, this community is one of the fastest growing in the United States. The individuals of this American community make up 16 major ethnic groups, speak over nine different languages in the U.S., and belong to a number of different religions and cultures. Their diversity reflects the richness and strength of our country.

"We are thankful to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and our current Democratic leadership, who have been vocal supporters of the AAPI community and recognize the contributions we have made and the struggles that continue.

"With increasing diversity, there are significant challenges due to cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic barriers. As Chair of the Congressional American Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), I am proud of the fierce advocacy of our Caucus members on important issues affecting the AAPI community. Through our CAPAC Task Forces, we have targeted such goals as eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities, protecting voting rights for racial, ethnic, and language minorities, enacting comprehensive immigration reform, fighting to create jobs, providing educational opportunities for the underserved, and ensuring full equity for the Filipino veterans who proudly served under the American flag during World War II. On the issue of the Filipino veterans, we have in the Senate, made great strides in securing the promised benefits for these brave veterans. Now is the time to fully recognize the services of these soldiers who fought for us in the Pacific theatre. I call on my colleagues in the House of Representatives to take urgent action and provide these veterans with the recognition and benefits they deserve.

"CAPAC has had the privilege to work with our colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Native American Caucus to advance the dialogue on these important issues.

"The many AAPI communities participating in this year's APA Heritage Month should be proud of our diverse heritage. I look forward to continuing our work together as we remember where we have been and celebrate where we are going."